

Utah 13ers

2024 AUGUST 3-4

Now the parent of tiny fat baby Pele Vega, born in January, I discontinue any imagination of seriously undergoing a long mountain effort this season. I reduce my time in autonomous-ish environments to 5:30-7:15am hike-jogs four days per week, with a few longer excursions celebrating off-trail travel with friends. Pele Vega's sleep regressions obliterate my imagination that I'd ever again express my native physicality and cognition through focused mountain efforts. It takes me some time to isolate that this feeling is the source of my bummers. I'm sort of embarrassed to acknowledge this – I like to think there's so much more to me, to my identity and modes for feeling strongly and connecting with humans, myself, autonomous environments. Though I thought I had already wrapped my mind around this life-transition, I find myself sort of grieving this imagination. My partner, Ana, notices my bummer. And Pele Vega's sleep appears to regularize. Ana says "You should go do a Thing while my mom is here. Seriously." I review my commitments, and spot exactly one available period: 6 days from now. I scroll routes that have appealed to me in recent seasons. Having scouted the Northern portion of the UT13ers route 5 weeks prior, that's firmly captivating my imagination. But the logistics are complex, with such short notice. Would I fly to SLC? Then rent a car? Hitch rides? Hire a shuttle? What groups do that? Maybe I can just ask random people in SLC? Oh, I have family in SLC, though I'm reluctant to burden them. Maybe a younger cousin would appreciate a weekend job? I contact Cousin Alex. He seems reluctant, though open to it. I calculate some compensation for him, based on a fair UT wage, government rate for vehicle use, etcetera. In parallel, I text Aunt Kath, who paced me through the hellishly hot section of Wasatch 100 in 2015. Aunt Kath replies "YES!". I contact dear old Pal Tim, who is interested though busy. Aunt Kath loops in Cousin Max and Cousin Adam. In 48 hours, logistics have been solved, thanks to family. I sit on a SaltLakeCity-bound airplane. Aunt Kath fetches me. Aunt Kath and Uncle Greg, Dog Rio and Dog Tuft, drive me in their happy van toward West Fork Blacks Fork Trailhead. The road gets bad, impassible in the happy van. We spot an excellent camp spot: reeds and slow water, a distant spruce forest rim, a backdrop of the high Uintas. We enjoy each others company as the stars glisten, and we listen to the wind in the trees carrying unnatural wafts of crying sheep. I'm sort of surprised by how aligned our sensibilities are, given our relatively sparse times together of the past decade. I leave the camp spot at 2am the next morning, and negotiate creeks spread across roads, hoping to spare my feet from wetness. I achieve the trailhead with irrational haste in my tummy, press buttons and start sprinting. Then I recognize I'd like to fill water vessels, re-tie shoes, and relax for a minute, so I return to the trailhead. After a couple minutes of faffing so, I spring into the woods.

I summit the 21 prominences above 13,000 feet in Utah.

I charge into Swift Creek campground. I sit on a rock in heavy rain as a free dog barks at me: 3Hz. I engage buttons on electronic devices in the dim light of my secondary headlamp. I see a cardboard sign "DAVE Campsite 1. Fuck Ya!" duct-tapped to a rock. There, a tent is set up for me, in which is a huge sleeping pad, sleeping bag, first aid kit, chair, cooler with ciders, and uncountably many tiny burritos. I sit in a chair, in the darkness, in the rain, by a creek, gradually consuming a tiny burrito and sipping a cider, nose pointed into the sky to discourage nausea. As light breaks, I lift out of a tent and peacefully connect with Cousin Adam and Cousin Max. Cousin Adam just returned from 4 years doing odd jobs in Sweden; Cousin Max is on the heels of a profoundly emotionally disruptive season, as he continues his studies at the University of Utah. I eat a tiny burrito in a chair by a creek as they fly-fish without speaking. We collect the free dog – skin and bones; "that dog's been here since we got here 5 days ago" says a camper – and we remind each other who we've come to be, and chat openly about invisible social forces we each feel. Aunt Kath, Uncle Greg, Cousin Adam, Cousin Max, and essentially-Cousin Taylor gather at Pal Tim's beer establishment for exercising love through smiles and comments and photos. One hour later, I sit on a Bozeman-bound airplane.

Okay, here are some measurables and methods of my solo unsupported summit of the 21 prominences in Utah whose elevation is at least 13,000 feet.¹ This is written for anyone seeking to undergo a similar effort.²

Timeframes. The outing lasted 23 hours 47 minutes 45 seconds.

03:27:15 Embarked from West Fork Blacks Fork Trailhead.³
05:23 Summited Tokewanna.
06:07 Summited Wapiti.
06:32 Summited Wasatch.

¹Some of these prominences do not satisfy the "100m of prominence"-definition; all of the prominences in Utah that satisfy the "100m of prominence"-definition are among this list of 21. Justification for isolating these 21 prominences can be found in David Rose's book *Utah Thirteeners: A Guide To Climbing the 13,000-Foot Peaks of the High Uintas*, which is the canonical text for the concept. With the minor exception of Henry's Fork, any reasonable route that summits all of the "100m of prominence"-summits in Utah above 13,000 feet would also summit this all of these 21 prominences.

²Contact me directly if you'd like more information of any sort.

³I'm recording my Embark Time to according to my GPS tracker (which is when I truly embarked). I snapped a time-stamped photo a couple minutes earlier, then signed the Trail Register and collected some fresher water.

07:45 Summited Lovenia.
 08:33 Summited Quandry.
 11:27 Summited Wilson.
 12:57 Summited Powell.
 ~13:48 Summited Cliff Point.⁴
 14:00 Summited Henry's Fork.
 14:42 Summited Dome.
 16:05 Summited Gunsight.
 16:47 Summited Gilbert.
 17:26 Summited Gunsight.⁵
 19:13 Summited Kings.
 19:39 Summited South Kings.
 ~20:04 Summited Gemini.⁶
 20:20 Summited Painter.
 20:43 Summited Trail Rider.
 21:27 Summited Roberts.
 ~22:09 Summited Pinnacle.⁷
 22:53 Summited Emmons.
 23:19 Summited South Emmons.
 03:15:00 Disembarked at Swift Creek Campground.

- Traveled about 60 miles from moment of Embarking to Disembarking.^{8 9}
- Stopped traveling 3 times for more than 30 seconds, for a total of about 17 minutes.

Personal & Environmental variables.

- Some personal measurements: 42 years and 4 months of age; 66kg in weight.
- (Civil) Twilight began at 5:56am; Sunrise was 6:25am; Sunset was 8:41pm; (Civil) Twilight ended at 9:10pm.
- For the entire day, winds were slight-to-nil while high cirrus clouds diffused the sun's light. Gentle rain graced my proximate environment around 10:40pm. About 30 minutes later, this transformed into heavy sheets of rain riding strong winds, including one flash of inner-cloud lightning. Heavy rain continued until 1:30am, after which it became moderate rain until I finished.
- Temperatures at 10,000 feet ranged 55-70F while light; 45-52F while dark.
- I encountered a total of about 30 parties in-route. All of these parties were along the route between Kings Peak and Henry's Fork Trailhead.¹⁰

Skills & practices for safely completing this route as < 1-day unsupported effort.

- Ability to recognize touchy rock-slide hazard.¹¹
- Efficient travel across talus that is bicycle-sized and smaller.
- Ability to navigate – at all scales – in darkness.
- Ability to safely travel long stretches without water sources.

⁴I neglected to snap a (time-stamped) photo at Cliff Point; this time is estimated according to my GPS logs. To keep the running binary-counting of my photos, I snapped (time- and location-stamped) photos at Henry's Fork and a small prominence off of Henry's Fork. In retrospect, this real-time decision generates more confusion than having simply skipped a number in my binary-counting photos.

⁵The route I chose to follow summited Gunsight twice.

⁶I neglected to snap a (time-stamped) photo at Gemini; this time is estimated according to my GPS logs.

⁷I neglected to snap a (time-stamped) photo at Pinnacle; this time is estimated according to my GPS logs.

⁸The condition of the road to the West Fork Blacks Fork Trailhead, and the nature of the vehicle I had access to, I traveled about 6 miles before Embarking on this route, from 2:00-3:22am.

⁹Challenges with navigation resulted in me leaving my intended route after Owl for safer terrain, followed by circuitous bushwhacking.

¹⁰One human was screaming "PANCAKE! PANCAKE! PANCAKE! ... GET OFF THE TRAIL! ... PANCAKE!" etc. Another was beating their leashed dog with their hiking pole. Another was vomiting. 4 were visibly carrying handguns. I spotted 4 piles of human shit, 1 splash of vomit.

¹¹Though relevant throughout, it's especially so for the descent off of Owl.

- Experience managing nausea and sleep-debt, such as by keeping spirits up and by modifying breathing, effort, hydration, and strategically consuming elements of nutrition.
- Ability to toggle into, and maintain, some sort of a Flow-State.

About approach.

- 5 weeks before this excursion, I scouted the stretch between Tokenawa and Cliff Point as a 3 day trip with dear Friends David and Sam.
- My training for this excursion was limited to a few months of 90-minute jogs 4 times per week, with a handful of longer excursions involving off-trail travel with substantial elevation gain.
- While traveling, I practiced slow deep breathing. I breathed through my nose as much as reasonable – in-and-out, or just out – in effort to retain water.
- My real-time attention was focused on attaining and holding a Flow-State, and in the mid-day hours managing nausea.
- The watch’s timer marked consumption of calories & salt, and assessment of nausea and mood.
- As a rule, I moved with meticulous care across steep talus, always with three points of contact and no dynamic movement; when lichened rocks were wet, I did similarly.

Gear.¹²

	Item	Use	Remarks, such as quantity carried
Primary layer	Shoes	entire	trail-running, w/ laces, w/ rock plate
	Socks	entire	ankle-high
	Shorts	entire	5" seam, tie-top, 5 pockets (4 open, 1 zipper)
	Shirt	entire	long sleeve, w/ hood
	Sweat band	entire	on wrist
	Watch	entire	w/o band
	Visor	50%	
	Pack	entire	minimal racing style
	Waist belt	entire	4 pouches
	Secondary layer	Shell	10%
Glove-mittens		15%	inner glove & removable outer mitten
Glasses		50%	large lens
Essential equipment	Water storage	entire	2 × 0.5 liter soft-flask w/ filter nozzle
	Headlamp	40%	up to 750 lumen
	GPS device	entire	5-minute satellite-tracking pings sent once per 30 minutes, 2-way text-messaging, emergency rescue button
	Smart-phone	entire	set GPS & time stamp on photo app
Auxiliary equipment	Poles	15%	collapsible, hand-straps, tiny baskets
	Chap stick	-	spf 15
	Straw	-	silicon, 4 inches
	Secondary headlamp	10%	tiny
	Buff	-	-
	Battery & cables	1 time	10000mAh & two 6-inch each
	Duct tape	-	wrapped on pole
	Lighter	-	half-sized
	Toilet paper	-	tightly-rolled
	Plastic bags	-	2 x doggie bags
Consumables	Rubber band	-	broccoli
	ID, Cash	-	Driver's License, \$110 (\$50+3x\$20), -
	Gels	2.5 gels = 950 calories	4 gels @ 380 cal/gel, pure carbs
	Bars	5 bars = 1,900 calories	9 bars @ ~380cal/bar, mostly nut fat, some soy protein
	Acetaminophen	2	6 x 500mg pills
	Caffeine	-	4 x 200mg pills
	Nausea relief	-	2 x Zofran
Salt	6,000mg	12,000mg Sodium-Citrate in one plastic bag	

¹²That I'm able to assess, all gear, including glue, is vegan.

How gear was worn.

- Body:** – Visor, long-sleeve shirt often w/ hood up, shorts, socks, shoes;
 – Sweat band on a wrist;
- Shorts:** – In 3 open pockets were 2,000 calories;
 – In 1 open pocket was smart-phone;
 – Zipper pocket carried chap stick, straw, and toilet paper in doggie bags cinched by rubber band.
- Waist belt:** – In 2 pockets were 2,000 calories;
 – In 1 pocket was salt and pills;
 – In 1 pocket was battery & electrical chords;
- Pack:** – Chest pouches: Water flasks, 1,220 calories.
 – Back compartment: Wind breaker, glove-mittens, buff, extra headlamp, lighter, space-blanket; ID & cash; Bladder.
 – Fastened to outside: 2 collapsable trekking poles each with some wraps of duct-tape at its center-o-mass.

About gear.

- I never felt the burden of the weight of my pack or gear.
- Most of the bars were removed from their wrapper to forgo managing trash.
- The battery & cables were for recharging the smart-phone, headlamp, and GPS tracker.
- The doggie bags were for collecting used toilet paper, and covering feet or hands if wet or cold. The rubber band cinched the doggie bags over the unused toilet paper. The duct tape was for blisters or tears. The straw was for drinking snowmelt. (I think the function of the rest of the gear is self-evident.)
- With the presently available materials and technologies, I believe this gear (not counting food) was as trim as safely viable.

Improvement. I am confident this route can be completed within 22 hours, and believe that an amateur's peaked effort could achieve a completion-time within 21 hours. Indeed, my planning, training, and execution of this route could be significantly improved.

- It would be advantageous to scout the final descent into forest, from Owl to the trail. That section was, by far and away, the least efficient of my excursion.¹³ Even if the weather was fair, and my lights were blazing brightly, having a path to follow that avoids challenging terrain could decrease elapsed time significantly. Such challenges are three-fold:
 - The final descent into forest presented steep touchy talus, and considerable rock-slide hazard. I traveled very slowly here to ensure my safety. Were I to do this route again, I would opt to travel from Owl slightly Southbound then Westbound for a gentler ramp into the forest.
 - The downed trees are overwhelming along Buffalo Creek. Eventually, I abandoned my intended route to hug the seem between the talus and the forest. Along this seem, the forest was thinner with lesser stacked down. I traversed

¹³At 10:30pm, a gentle rain graced my local environment after hours of efficient movement and flow. At 11:00pm, just after summiting Emmons, turbulent wind brought heavy sheets of rain. I hustled to cover ground before the lichened rocks became too slick to run on. Once slick, I shifted travel modes to involve my hands. My primary headlamp then blinked out of batteries, so I summoned my secondary headlamp. A flash of inner-cloud lightning signaled that should leave the ridge. I then found myself side-hilling on slick touchy talus promising to collapse. Evoking my smart-phone to navigate was not practical in the wetness. My secondary headlamp toggled into emergency mode: very dim. I continued, very slowly and carefully, into a forest riddled with layers of downed trees. In heavy rain, I blindly found trail. Once at the trail, in my dim light I commenced sprinting to achieve the 24-hour threshold.

the Eastern shore of Grayling Lake, though the Western Shore is surely offers much easier travel.

- It would be advantageous to identify handrails, or similar (but not a hand-held GPS devise), for efficiently traveling through forest to find the trail.
- The route I planned from Powell to Gilbert was ill-conceived. I believe it would be significantly faster, and more strategic, to travel from Powell to Gilbert by dropping into the headwater basin of Henry’s Fork. Indeed, this would avoid summiting Gunsight twice; it would avoid ascending the Western face of Gunsight which is perhaps the steepest and loosest section of the route I followed; it would afford an important and final opportunity to collect water (snow-melt was essentially not available in my execution); it would afford travel on grass and tundra in place of pure talus.
- It would be strategic to time this excursion for early-July. Indeed, this would afford more light-time and more snow-melt to capture.
- It would be strategic to calibrate embark-time to reach the section between Lovenia and Quandry as day-light breaks, and/or to reach the final trail before day-light concludes.
- It would be useful to use a trusted and tried fueling plan. In my excursion, about half of the calories I carried were a pure-carb gel, while I normally consume mostly fats for such efforts. I found myself needlessly managing nausea. Also, I carried a salt powder that I mixed in a soft-flask, while normally I consume salt pills by mouth. I only carried one filter nozzle that attached to a half-liter soft-flask, and filled my other half-liter soft-flask with the salt. So refilling my water required considerable down-time as I filtered 2 liters of water through a single filter-nozzle whose flow-rate diminished noticeably through the day; generally, managing water and salt was needlessly complicated.
- Account for the road’s condition approaching the West Fork Blacks Fork Trailhead, which requires a high-clearance vehicle or willingness to foot-travel extra distance to the Trailhead. Due to the condition of this road, I traveled an additional 6 miles before embarking, resulting in a delayed start and needless added time-on-feet.
- Avoid precipitation. The majority of the route requires travel on talus covered in lichen. When wet, such talus requires much more careful, and slow, travel. Also, about 75% of the route is vulnerable to lightning hazard. I was caught in a heavy rainstorm, including signs of lightning, as I descended Emmons. This slowed my progress more than any other factor.
- Travel solo. If traveling as a pair, I believe that the factors that challenge efficient movement is the union of such challenges for each person; and the factors that contribute to efficient movement intersect. In this way, I believe a pair will always travel slower than a focused solo traveler – I have not found that the added up-lift of traveling with company out-weighs these phenomena. Relatedly, I found this entire route to be safe and easy to read and predict hazards as they presented. In my opinion, this route avoids certain-death exposure, and the most technical terrain (4th class) is the ascent and descent of Quandry; otherwise the route does not exceed 3rd class travel.
- Charge headlamp(s) while traveling, for the final stretch. My charging cable dislodged while day-time traveling. A couple hours into darkness, my primary headlamp blinked into “emergency mode”, which is very dim. When this happened, I deployed my secondary headlamp, and connected my primary headlamp to my external battery. I used this secondary headlamp on its brightest mode to aid my navigation in awkward terrain. Soon, my secondary headlamp blinked into “emergency mode”, which is even more very dim. My primary headlamp did not charge adequately in the meantime,

so I completed my excursion in the very dim light of my secondary headlamp. This was probably the second strongest factor that slowed my progress.

- As planned, my effort never exceeded zone 3. Based on other similar excursions, I require about 125 (fat-based) calories per hour for 24-hour zone 3 efforts. And, indeed, I consumed 2,850 calories, for an average consumption rate of 120 calories per hour. Yet I carried about 5,220 calories, which is factor of 1.83 more calories than I consumed. It would be strategic to calculate calories in advance, of course with extra calories to safely manage bonking and safely endure prolonged down-time if rendered immovable.
- Since January, my sleep has been irregular and contracted. Generally, my imagination did not seriously land on this route until about 6 days before execution. The entire excursion was arranged very last-minute. More advanced planning, including training, could have made several aspects of this excursion more efficient.